

Playing House by GallifreyGod

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Summary:

After Lonnie leaves Joyce with a six-year-old Jonathan and a one-week-old Will, she ends up exhausted and in a little bit of trouble. Hopper steps in to help her get back on track, but neither of them expected for the wrong people to see them... and they certainly didn't expect to fall in love

1. Postpartum

Author's Note:

Hey, I'm back again with some Jopper for y'all. This was definitely a heavy on the heart one for me but I enjoyed writing this so much, I hope you like it!

It had ended with a bang. Fighting, swearing, and punching. Lonnie was gone, Joyce left with a one-week-old baby, and a traumatized Jonathan. To be honest, Joyce had felt safer when her family wasn't around Lonnie, and he wasn't much help anyway.

It wasn't until Joyce had almost fallen asleep at the wheel when she realized things were harder than she expected. A desk sergeant on his way home had found Joyce pulled over on the side of the road when he called it in.

The cop could see the dark purple bags under the young mother's eyes the moment she rolled the window down. After explaining that she had just had a long day, the officer asked her to at least get checked over at the hospital to make sure she was alright.

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It was a long and dreadful hour, sitting in the emergency room with a sleepy baby and a bored 6-year-old. The nurses had said something about dehydration and then rushed in with a bag of saline. They were at least nice enough to give Jonathan a coloring book.

"Joyce, what happened?" Hopper asked as he walked into the E.R room. Jim had been her friend since high school, and even though they weren't as close since her marriage, he was still around. Joyce wondered how long it would be until Hop found out about Lonnie... guess it had to be now.

"I had pulled over on the side of the road. I thought I was gonna fall asleep so I stopped for a few minutes. Hopper, what's going on? Why are they not letting me leave?" Joyce didn't even bother exchanging hello's first.

"Hey, buddy." Hopper said to Jonathan. He sat in the chair next to her bed as he motioned to hold his Godchild. After handing Will over to Hop, she waited for him to speak up.

"They're debating calling CPS, Joyce. They said that you hadn't slept in almost 48 hours. Is that true?" Hopper asked as he rocked Will.

"Yes, but CPS? Seriously? Hop, you can't let them do this! Please, I'm trying to get back on my feet since Lonnie left. Will cries at night and it keeps Jonathan up! I'm trying... I'm just so tired." Joyce immediately broke down in tears.

"Shh, Joyce. Relax. I won't let them do anything, I promise. I'm gonna talk to them and see what I can do. You have to take a deep breath though, they can't see you like this." Hopper whispered as he rubbed her arm.

"Alright, I... I trust you. I would never do anything to harm them, Hop. I'm just trying to balance this." Joyce said as she tried to slow her breathing down.

"I know. I promise I'll figure this out." Hop said as he gently placed the baby back in her arms. "I'll go talk to them." Hopper reassured her.

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"Let's not get CPS involved with this, alright? I know Joyce, she's a good mother. She's just tired." Hopper pleaded with the nurse.

"Chief, with all due respect, you have to understand that she is utterly exhausted. She was so dehydrated I'm surprised she was even conscious. How do we know it isn't the same for the children?" The nurse retorted, setting Hopper aflame.

"You've got to be kidding me. Are you trying to tell me you think Joyce is starving her children? She had a diaper bag full of bottles when she came in. You are nobody to be making allegations right now." Hopper flared under his breath so nobody would hear him.

The nurse raised her brow at him, giving him a glare.

Scrubbing his face with his palms, Hopper sighed. "Alright, let's make a deal. I will go home with Joyce tonight, make sure she gets some rest. I'll make sure she and the kids are all well taken care of and then you don't call CPS. Can we agree on that?" Hopper bargained hopefully.

The nurse paused and sighed. "If this wasn't such a small town then I'd say no. Take her home tonight, Chief. Make sure she is well fed, rested, and the place is suitable for children. Do not make me regret this." The nurse said as she walked away.

After walking back into Joyce's room, Hopper shut the door behind him and sat.

"They're releasing you under a few conditions. I'm gonna help you take care of them for a few days." Hopper said.

2. Welcome Home for Now

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper arrives at the Byer's house to help, and he braves his first night with the baby.

Hopper carried Will's car seat in one hand and held Jonathan's hand in the other. Joyce fussed with the keys as she tried to fight off the exhaustion long enough to get inside.

"I'll get you some blankets and a pillow. I might have some pajamas here too." Joyce said as she rushed around the house. It wasn't as destroyed as Hopper expected, but it did look like a single mother of two lived there.

"Joyce, I've got this. I will get Jonathan down, I'll feed Will, and I'll get blankets. Just please go rest." Hopper said as he gingerly set down Will's carrier.

"Bu—" Joyce began but Hopper hushed her softly. "Sleep." He said with a reassuring look as he nudged her off. Eventually, she gave up and kissed both boys goodnight.

"Alright, you ready for bed, kiddo? I'll even read you a bedtime story." Hopper said as the six-year-old smiled at him.

"How about you brush your teeth and I'll get you some pajamas? Sound good?" Hopper asked. Jonathan smiled again and ran off to brush his teeth.

"Hey, little guy. Please, please, please, don't cry too much tonight. I'm trying to do your mom a favor." Hopper said as he knelt next to the baby seat. The infant looked at him with wide brown eyes.

"Alright, kiddo, good talk. Let's go read your brother a story then we will chill out and watch some television." Hopper said as he carefully took Will out of the way-too-complicated car seat.

With Jonathan tucked into bed and out cold, Joyce snoring loudly from her room, and Will completely fed, Hopper pulled the bassinet next to the couch. Turning the TV on mute, he pulled the throw off the couch and started to drift into sleep.

It wasn't until three in the morning when Hopper shot out of sleep. He could hear Will just about to wail when he picked the infant up to comfort him.

He cradled baby Will in his arm as he tried to prepare a bottle in only the moonlight. Luckily, Hopper remembered the quickest way to warm a bottle was to run it under warm water. Just as Will was about to scream, Hop finished the bottle and began to feed the child.

"Good boy, no need to wake Mommy. We've got this." Hopper whispered as he walked around the kitchen with Will in his arms.

Forty-five minutes after Will finished his bottle and fell asleep, Hopper woke up again as he heard the baby fussing. "Alright, diaper right? Okay..."

Jim fished around the diaper bag for a clean change. "Okay, buddy, some ground rules." Hopper began as he started to unfasten the diaper. "No peeing on Uncle Jim alright? No kicking either, save that for football days." He said as he braced himself for what could very well be an explosion.

Will watched Hopper as he tried to figure out exactly how to maneuver a dirty diaper. The 'no kicking' rule didn't seem to get through to the two week old very well, but luckily there was no fountain.

With Will swaddled into a fresh diaper, Hopper dozed back off the sleep. Only having to do about 3 more bottles throughout the night, but luckily no sobbing cries woke up Joyce.

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Joyce stirred in her sleep as the sun beamed through her window. As she remembered the previous night, she shot out of bed and ran into the kitchen.

"Alright. Do you know four plus four?" Joyce could barely hear Hopper since the smell of fresh bacon almost knocked her off her feet.

"Is it six?" Came the hopeful voice of Jonathan. "I'm six!" The child cheered.

"Almost! It's not quite six. Four plus four is eight. Good morning sleepy head!" Hopper said as he turned to smile at Joyce. She could see he was wearing a pink apron that said "kiss the cook"

"Oh Hop, you didn't have to do all this." Joyce said as panic began to set in.

"Nonsense. Jonathan and I were just doing some math quizzes while the pancakes finish up. How do you take your coffee?" Hop asked as he flipped the bacon.

"I uh... three creams and three sugar. Really, Hop, this means the world to me. Thank you." Joyce said as she picked Will up out of the bassinet that was pulled into the kitchen.

"We all need some time off, Joyce. It was no trouble at all." Hopper smiled as he handed her the mug of coffee.

Joyce leaned over and kissed the top of Jonathan's head before she sat down with the baby. "How'd it go?" She asked nervously.

"It went perfectly. The little guy is quite the poop machine but I think we tackled the first night." Hopper replied as he set plates down in front of Joyce and Jonathan.

Jonathan burst out laughing at the words 'poop machine' and even Joyce couldn't help but to giggle.

"I really mean it, Hop. Thank you so much." Joyce said as she gave him a warm and grateful smile.

"It was no problem. Seriously."

3. You Make it Look So Easy

Summary for the Chapter:

Powell & Callahan see Hopper at the park with the little ones...

"I was thinking maybe you could catch up on some sleep and I'll take the kids down to the park?" Hopper suggested as they both scrubbed over piled dishes.

"Hop, you don't have to stay. I appreciate everything you're doing but you don't have to do this." Joyce said sympathetically as she looked up at the taller man.

"Joyce, I'm your friend. Friends help friends. You need a break every once in a while." Hop said as he met her eyes.

"I know Hop but I feel like I'm asking too much." Joyce sighed as she looked down at the plate she was scrubbing.

"Answer me one thing, when's the last time you had a good night's sleep before last night." He asked honestly as he continued scrubbing the soapy plate.

Joyce sighed. She couldn't even remember. It had to be before Jonathan was even a thought. Life had just moved so quickly, there was no time for sleep.

"One week Joyce. Just one week. Let me help you with this. I need to make sure you're alright so I can sleep at night." Hopper pleaded with puppy eyes.

Joyce was far too exhausted to argue about it, especially knowing she would give in by the end. "Alright, thank you. I mean it, not many friends would do this." Joyce replied.

"No need to thank me, Joyce. It takes a village to raise a baby but I think you and I can figure this out." He said with a smile.

Hopper was pushing Jonathan on the swing at the park while also trying to keep Will covered from the sun.

"Higher! Higher!" Jonathan cheered with laughter as Hopper laughed with him.

"I don't want you to fly off into space, kid!" Hopper joked as he pushed Jonathan's swing higher.

"Chief!" Powell called as he and Callahan walked across the park towards him.

"What are you guys doing here?" Hopper asked as he kept pushing the swing.

"Where the fuck have you been, Chief?" Callahan asked, rather too loudly.

"Hey! Watch your mouth. Can't you see I have a six-year-old next to me?" Hopper said with an angry glare.

"Is that... Byers?" Powell asked as he eyed the kid.

"Jonathan. His name is Jonathan. I'm helping Joyce out while she gets some rest." Hopper said as he peaked into Will's stroller.

"You could've at least called in and said you weren't showing up!" Powell retorted as he threw his hands up.

"I meant to call Flo this morning. I was up with the baby last night." Hopper replied. Callahan snorted under his breath which earned him a glare from Jim that could throw daggers.

"Look, you're big boys. You can handle a few days without me. I'm needed elsewhere right now." Hopper said as he went back to pushing the swing.

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Dinner was the first time that Hopper had really noticed Joyce was present. She had been mentally absent from exhaustion, but as dinner went on she seemed to perk up.

"How about we go grocery shopping tomorrow? I've noticed you're running out of eggs and milk." Hopper said with a smile as he looked next to him.

"Yeah, I've gotta get some more coffee too. I haven't been able to go since Will was born. I have a whole list of things I need." Joyce groaned.

Hopper noticed Joyce was begging to look distressed again. "Hey, hey it's alright. It's no biggie, we'll grab the essentials and get you all fixed up." He said as he patted her back gently.

"I know." She said with a deep breath. "It's just... stressful." She added.

"I know, but I'm here to help take some of that stress away." Jim smiled as he moved a strand of her hair out of her face.

"Thank you." She said with a small smile as she looked up at him.

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Hopper and Joyce had been watching 'The Aristocats' with Jonathan when Joyce had fallen asleep with baby Will on her chest.

After waking up around 8:30, she made her way into Jonathan's room. She could hear Hopper's voice faintly as she walked down the hall.

When Joyce walked into Jonathan's room she saw Hopper sitting in a chair with her eldest son. Jonathan was curled up on his lap, holding onto his blankie as Hopper read to him. The two of them both looked exhausted but Joyce knew how much Jonathan would fight to stay awake during bedtime reading.

"'Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting' said Peter Pan." Hopper read from the book. Jonathan watched him turn the page with sleepy eyes.

Joyce could see the small smile that Hopper flashed her as he saw her in the doorway.

"Ready for bed, Sport?" He asked as Jonathan nodded tiredly. Hop picked the boy up out of his lap gently and laid him down into bed.

"Goodnight, sweetheart." Joyce said as she walked in, leaning over to tuck him in.

"Goodnight Mommy, goodnight Uncle Jim." The six-year-old said tiredly before rolling over.

Hopper turned the light out and walked out side by side with Joyce. Shutting the door quietly, he saw Joyce smile at him.

"I can't ever repay you for this." Joyce said quietly as she rubbed a tear out of her eye.

"I'm not asking you to." Hopper smiled back while he gently wiped the next tear from her cheek.

4. See You at the Reunion

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper's aunt sees him and Joyce... maybe she gets the wrong idea.

"It's okay, buddy. Shh shh shh." Hopper said as he pulled himself off the couch. It had to have been around three when Will started to howl in the night.

"What's wrong?" Joyce asked as she sluggishly walked into the living room.

"It's okay, I've got it. Someone's hungry, huh little guy?" He smiled as he rocked Will against his chest.

"Here, let me help you." Joyce said as she rubbed her eyes. She began to fish a bottle out of the cupboard while Jim prepped the formula mix.

"Are you sure?" Hop asked as he took the bottle she handed to him.

"Yes, Hop. I'm used to waking up at this time of night anyway." Joyce answered as she softly took Will from his arms so he could shake the bottle.

Hopper groaned and stretched his arms out before he sat on the couch next to her.

"I'll take him for the rest of the night so you can get some sleep." Joyce said in between hushes.

"It's alright Joyce, you need the sleep. I can go days without it." Hopper laughed.

"I thought so too, then I ended up in the hospital." Joyce laughed quietly along with him.

"I know, I just don't want you to get too exhausted again." Hopper sighed. "You need sleep more than I do."

"How about we take turns? We'll both get some sleep at least." Joyce suggested.

"If it will make you feel better." Hopper said as he smoothed Will's dark brown hair down.

"I just want you to get some sleep too, Hop. I don't want you to take on too much." Joyce replied.

"I'll be okay. I'll take the next diaper, how about that?" He said as he looked back up at her.

"Deal." She smiled before they both looked down at the baby.

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"Alright, I need eggs, milk, coffee, we also need more formula." Joyce said as she held Jonathan's hand. Hopper glanced down at the list as he pushed the cart in front of them. Will's car seat sat snug in the front of the cart as the baby slept soundly.

"You had graham crackers on your list too, right? Those are here." Hopper said as he pointed them out to her.

"Jimmy? Jimmy is that you?" An older woman said as she walked down the aisle towards him.

"Aunt Helen? What are you doing in Hawkins?" Hopper asked as he exchanged confused looks with Joyce

"I've come to see your father! Now, who's this, Jimmy?" The elder woman said as she grabbed Hopper into a hug.

Before Hopper could answer, the elder woman leaned over to peek inside the baby carrier. "Oh isn't he precious! Jimmy, he looks just like you!" The woman cooed.

"Oh! Oh no no, Aunt Helen! He's not mi—" Hopper didn't even get to finish his sentence before the woman began talking again.

"Why didn't you tell me you had such a beautiful family, Jimmy?" Helen beamed as she saw Jonathan hiding behind Joyce's leg. "Who's

this little guy?"

Hopper gulped and gave Joyce a nervous look. She was clearly trying not to burst out laughing.

"This is Jonathan. He's a little shy." Hopper said cautiously. He tried not to glare at Joyce who was bursting at the seams trying not to laugh.

"Well, are you going to introduce me to your wife?" Aunt Helen asked with a scolding eye at Jim's manners.

"Joyce. nice to meet you." Joyce said as she stuck her hand out to shake the elder woman's hand.

"Ah, yeah. I'll uh, I'll stop by dad's soon to come and catch up with you." Hopper said as they exchanged quick goodbyes.

When they were finally out of earshot, Joyce almost choked as she giggled so hard. "Guess I'll be at the reunion, huh *Jimmy*."

"Oh you are just loving this, aren't you." Hopper tried to look irritated but he couldn't help but burst out laughing with her.

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"Joyce!" Hopper called. "Joyce, come here!"

Joyce said across the floors as she ran into the living room. "What? What happened?" She asked worriedly.

"Look, Will is smiling at me," Hopper said as he giggled at the baby lying on the couch.

Joyce wanted to smack him for scaring her to death but she also wanted to laugh. "It's probably just gas, Hop. He's only two and a half weeks old." She said as she peeked over the couch to look at him.

"Nooo" Hopper cooed at the baby. "No, he's smiling because he likes his Uncle Jim, huh. Yes, you do. Yes, you do!" He cooed in a rather adorable baby voice.

"Nuh-uh. He's smiling at his mama." Joyce said as she softly pinched his cheeks. Will immediately dropped the smile and frowned at her.

"Ha! I told you. He's smiling at Uncle Hopper!" Jim began cooing again to the baby who hiccupped in response.

"Ugh, you two are going to be two of the same, I swear." Joyce jokingly rolled her eyes.

--

The third night started to feel like a routine. Before convincing Joyce to get some sleep, he helped Jonathan brush his teeth.

"Say cheese!" Hopper said as he mimicked a large toothy smile the kid made. Jonathan tried not to laugh as Jim pretended to check every front tooth after brushing.

"Alright. Ready for bed, Kiddo?" Hopper asked as Jonathan nodded, leading them to his room.

"Which book tonight?" Hopper asked as he scanned the shelf. "Peter Pan!" The 6-year-old begged.

After story time was finished and Jonathan and Joyce were both asleep, Hopper settled on the couch with Will and his bottle.

He mindlessly stared at the TV as the pictured flickered without sound. Will was sound asleep on his chest after he finished a bottle, curled up and listening to Jim's heartbeat.

He couldn't sleep. He was exhausted but the restlessness seemed to come from his thoughts.

Did Helen really think Joyce was his wife? It wasn't *that* crazy of a thought! They had both looked like a married couple as they trailed through the store. Two kids and a cart full of groceries could only look like a real family.

But why was it bothering him? Four more days and none of this would be happening anymore. The thought of that made Hopper's stomach turn. He'd not only have to make up some bogus story of

divorce next time he saw Helen but... he'd *really* have to leave.

No. This wasn't his family. This wasn't his normal... this wasn't *his* life. It was Lonnie and Joyce's. Hopper wasn't in that equation and he shouldn't have been thinking otherwise. There wasn't room for him...

But it still bothered him.

It had been three days. Breakfast with the group had become as normal as bedtime stories with Jonathan, chores with Joyce, and night feedings with Will. Three days... everything changed in three days.

Now? Now he couldn't even picture going home. He *was* home. Three days and now he couldn't imagine life without Joyce and the kids. He couldn't picture living without the background noise of Joyce's shower or the gurgles and coos in the night.

The hardest part was he couldn't imagine waking up without Joyce now. He looked forward to seeing her every single morning for breakfast and every night for dinner. He wouldn't have that anymore.

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Joyce got up around four in the morning to grab a glass of water and check on Hopper. As she tiptoed into the living room she saw Hop lying on the couch with Will sound asleep on his chest.

It burned in her chest more than it warmed her heart. She couldn't imagine him leaving now. What would Jonathan say? What would she do without him? Who would she talk to in the night during diaper changes? Who would be there to tell her how pretty she looked even covered in baby vomit and dried formula?

But that wasn't the worst of it for her. She knew she'd miss him. She'd miss his annoying morning smile and the smell of his aftershave in the bathroom. She'd miss the rub on her back when she cried and she'd miss watching him read to Jonathan every night. She'd miss the silly laugh he did when Will did something funny and she'd miss the way he looked at her.

They'd miss each other.

5. Honey

Summary for the Chapter:

I like snuggles, do you? Wink

"Oh C'mon kid. Was that necessary? I thought we had ground rules." Hopper groaned as he shielded himself from being covered in pee. As quickly as he could remember, he covered the baby with a cloth so he wouldn't be in the 'splash zone' as Joyce called it.

"Joyce, can you grab me a clean shirt?" Hopper called as he finished up the diaper. As he waited for her, he pulled his shirt off and balled it up.

She tried not to be too stunned when she saw him without his shirt on. He definitely had the sexy dad bod' down.

"Thanks, Honey." Hopper said mindlessly as he slipped the clean henley over his torso. Joyce tried to avoid the pang in her heart when he called her 'honey' but it wasn't going anywhere.

"Someone got stuck in the splash zone." She laughed as she picked Will up off the changing table.

"Me and him established ground rules. No peeing on me during diaper changes, but he's a boy. Boys don't believe in rules." Hopper laughed as he threw the dirty diaper in the trash.

"Isn't that the truth. You hated following rules in school." Joyce laughed and raised an eyebrow at him.

"I got caught once. It was one cigarette and it wasn't even mine." Hopper pleaded to no avail.

"Mhm. That's why I caught you smoking it under the stairs outside." Joyce laughed.

"For the record, you didn't stop me. You joined in. Equally at fault here." Hopper replied with a laugh as he walked out of the nursery with her.

"Why don't you go take a nap, Hop. You look exhausted. You can sleep in my bed." Joyce said as she ran her palm over his cheek.

Well... he *was* tired. "Are you sure?" He asked nervously.

"Of course. Will and Jonathan are gonna go down for a nap anyways and I've got laundry to do. Go take a rest." Joyce smiled.

"Will you wake me up if you need me?" Hopper asked with concern. He knew she probably wouldn't.

"Absolutely. I'll wake you up for dinner. Go on, you need some sleep. It's my turn to take care of you." She giggled as she nudged him towards her room.

"Alright. Thank you." Hopper said as he patted her shoulder and found his way to her room.

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Hopper wasn't sure how long he had slept when he finally came to. All he could focus on was the warm body under his arm. As soon as he realized he wasn't alone, his eyes flickered open.

Joyce was sound asleep under his arm with her nose pressed into his chest. Hop smiled, she looked so peaceful with a small smile on her face.

Will seemed to be asleep in the bassinet next to the bed and since the clock said four, he assumed Jonathan was napping. He could enjoy this a little longer.

He gently ran his hand through her hair, rubbing her head as she snuggled deeper into him. She looked beautiful as her eyelashes fluttered in her sleep.

Hopper pressed a small kiss to her forehead before letting his head fall back to his pillow. She was becoming a drug to him. He didn't know how he was going to live without her now.

It had taken less than four days and he was already used to seeing her every day. He was used to the smell of her hair when she hugged

him. He was used to the way her eyes sparkled, even in the dark of night. He was used to bickering about who was gonna get up in the night to tend to Will. He was so used to this already.

Joyce stirred in her sleep as she started to wake up. She looked up at Hopper as he eyes opened slowly.

"Hey." She said quietly with a soft smile.

"Hey." Hopper replied in the same quiet tone. Well, at least it wasn't awkward. "Is Jonathan asleep?" He asked as he continued to pet her hair.

"Yeah, he went down about two hours ago. I didn't mean to disturb you, I was putting laundry away and I figured I'd lay down while everyone was asleep." Joyce said as she started to look guilty.

"Don't worry about it, you didn't wake me. I was wondering if I could treat you and the kids to a burger at Benny's tonight?" Hopper asked, not bothering to stop rubbing her head.

"Are you sure? I'm sure Jonathan will be over the moon about that." Joyce giggled.

"Yeah, I think we all need a few minutes out of the house. Don't you think?" Hop asked.

"I think that's a good idea. I'll go get Jonathan up so we can go." Joyce said as she slipped out of bed.

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"Chief! Byers family! What's the occasion?" Benny asked as he flipped a towel over his shoulder.

"A good ole' Benny burger sounded good." Hopper laughed as he patted Benny's shoulder with one hand and carried Will's carrier in the other.

Benny tried to choose his words carefully. He heard through the grapevine that Lonnie was gone but why Hopper was with them? That was the mystery.

"There's always time for Benny Burgers. What can I get you?" He asked as he took out his order booklet.

"Whats on the menu for you, kiddo?" Hop asked Jonathan.

"Hotdog! With fries please." Jonathan said politely.

"He'll have a chocolate milk with that too. Can I have a cheeseburger, no onions, with fries and a Coke?" Joyce asked as she handed her and Jonathan's menu back.

"Sounds good. For you chief?" Benny asked.

"Cheeseburger, No tomatoes, fries, and a coke. Thanks, Ben." Hopper finished and handed his menu.

Benny came back with the drinks and glanced at Hopper. "Chief, can I talk to you for a second. I've got a question I meant to ask you last week." He lied as he cocked his head towards the kitchen.

Hopper stepped out of the booth and followed him out of Joyce's earshot.

Benny leaned against the stove and crossed his arms, pausing before speaking. "...*really?*"

"It's not what you think. She needed help and I stepped up so she could get some sleep. Nothing is happening." Hopper groaned.

"Jimmy, you walk in here with a wife and two kids. People are gonna talk." Benny said in an exasperated tone.

"She's not my wife, it looks that way, yes, but I'm just helping her out." Hopper defended.

"Just promise me this isn't a ploy to get her into bed, Hop. Because that would be low, even for you." Benny said with his brows raised.

"Absolutely not. Not with Joyce. She's too good for that." Hopper sighed as he walked back to his seat.

When Joyce asked him what that was all about, he muttered

something about property lines and kept his eyes focused on his drink.

"She's not my wife"

6. Sweet Nothings

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper has it out with Lonnie while Joyce and Jonathan have a heart-to-heart

Notes for the Chapter:

Lonnie violence, just a warning.

Hopper was patting Will's back as the baby laid draped over his shoulder. His head immediately shot up from the TV as he heard the doorknob rattling.

It couldn't be Joyce, she was still sleeping in her bedroom. Hopper's heart dropped into his stomach as he saw the door open.

"Why is there a fucking pig in my house?" Lonnie shouted as he saw Hopper.

"Get out. Now!" Hopper growled as he stood up from the couch with Will.

"Who the hell are you to tell me what to do in my house? What's the matter asshole, you can't find a family of your own so you take mine?" Lonnie spat as he stepped up closer to Hop.

"I'm giving you six seconds to get the fuck out of here before I kick your ass." Hopper yelled in his face.

"Hop what's going... Lonnie?" Joyce asked as she emerged from her room. "Lonnie, get out."

"You miss me, baby? I guess not since your already shacking up with this dick sucker." Lonnie sneered. The smell of vodka was filling the room from his drunken breath.

"I'm here to help her because you're just father of the year aren't you? Leaving your wife with a six-year-old and two-week-old? Just as good of a man as your father, huh?" Hopper spat back.

Lonnie went to throw a fist as Hopper ducked, covering the infant from the punch. Joyce quickly retrieved Will from Jim and stepped back.

Instead of beating up Lonnie like he wanted to, Hop pushed him against the wall and grabbed his wrists.

"Lonnie Byers, you're under arrest for child endangerment and assault of a police officer. Joyce, please call Flo and have her send the boys down." Hopper asked as he slapped cuffs onto Lonnie before dragging him out to the blazer.

"I'll be back, asshole! You're not gonna steal my family because you're too fucking stupid to have your own." Lonnie yelled as Hopper stuffed him in the blazer.

Jim grabbed Lonnie by the collar of his coat and went nose to nose with him. "You are going to stay away from Joyce and the kids. You left, so stay that way. Next time you come back, I **will** kill you. Is that understood?" Hopper gritted out through his teeth.

When Lonnie didn't answer, he slammed his head against the seat. "I said, is that understood?" Hopper shouted in his face.

"Fuck off, pig." Lonnie spat. Just as Hopper raised his fist to knock his teeth out, Powell and Callahan pulled up.

"Get this asshole out of here and book him." Hopper shouted as he pulled Lonnie by the neck.

"What the hell happened?" Powell asked as Callahan shoved him into their car.

"Tried to punch me when I was holding the baby. I want him down for child endangerment and assault of a cop. Don't let me see his ass here again." Hopper said as he went back in the house and slammed the door.

--

"I'm so sorry, Hop." Joyce said as she handed him a cup of coffee. She sat down on the couch next to him as he fed Will a bottle.

"Don't apologize, Joyce. You didn't do anything." Hopper said as he took a sip of his coffee.

"I'm changing the locks today. I'm so sick of him and his bullshit." Joyce sighed.

"I'll take you down to Melvald's to pick up a new lock. Is Jonathan okay? He didn't see too much did he?" Hopper asked nervously.

"No, he's alright. I just want you to know that I appreciate everything you've done for me, I can't thank you enough." Joyce said as she patted his back.

"You don't have to thank me, Joyce. Just promise me one thing." Jim said as he set down his mug.

"Anything." She replied.

"Don't ever let him back in this house again. If he was willing to punch me with the baby in my arms then I don't know what he'd do to you and the boys." Hopper said with a worried look.

"I'm done with him. Done for good." Joyce answered with a sorrowful expression.

Hopper could tell that Joyce was about to cry before he swayed her into a hug.

--

"Hey, buddy." Joyce said quietly as she walked into Jonathan's room. Will was snuggled into her arms and sleeping soundly.

"Hi, Mommy." Jonathan greeted as he turned away from his desk. Joyce could see that he was coloring in a new coloring book that Hopper bought for him.

"Here, come sit next to me." Joyce patted the bed and motioned for him.

"Why was daddy here today?" Jonathan asked innocently. He was too young to understand all of this... he was too young to have to deal

with Lonnie's crap.

"Well, Daddy isn't supposed to be here and he got in trouble. I'm sorry about this, baby." Joyce said sadly as she brushed his hair down with her hand.

"Is he coming back?" Jonathan asked with a sour face. Joyce had always known that he wasn't his father's number one fan. She shook her head with a frown. "No, Honey. He's not coming back. Is that okay?"

Jonathan nodded. "He's scary sometimes, Mommy. I don't want him to hurt us." His words broke Joyce's heart. No child should ever have to be scared of their father.

"He won't hurt us, I promise. Hop took him to a place where bad men go. He won't let daddy hurt us." Joyce looked down at her feet. Why did this have to be so difficult?

"Is Uncle Jim gonna be our new daddy?" Jonathan asked after a few minutes of silence.

"Wh...what?" Joyce asked in pure shock. How was she supposed to respond to that?

"Are you gonna get married to him?" He asked with his eyes widened.

"Oh, honey I... I don- I don't think that's gonna happen." Joyce said worriedly.

"Do you want to marry him?" Jonathan asked again. Joyce felt like she was being interrogated with questions. Could she honestly confide in her six-year-old knowing he wouldn't understand anyway?

"Well, Uncle Jim and I have a special relationship. He's like my best friend." Joyce began as her son nodded. "And sometimes when you're friends with someone you like them more than just a friend. "

"Like a mommy and daddy." Jonathan stated While Joyce nodded.

"But even when you like someone like a mommy likes a daddy, it doesn't always mean that it will end up that way. Two people should

feel the same way, but I don't think Uncle Jim likes me that way. Do you understand?" Joyce asked as she looked down at him intently.

"Yeah. If Uncle Jim *does* like you that way, will you marry him?" He asked her with what seemed like a sliver of hope.

"I don't know. I uh... I don't know, buddy." Joyce said as she patted his arm.

"But you like him that way? Like a mommy likes a daddy?" Jonathan asked.

Joyce stared at the floor and tried not to let tears well in her eyes.

"Yeah, I think I do. Very much so."

Notes for the Chapter:

My dad is like a carbon copy of Lonnie, so this chapter deff got to my heart,

7. Just Too Good at Goodbye

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper and Joyce have an emotional goodbye...
sorta

This was it. Hopper was packing up and getting ready to return back home. Back home, back to work, back to the real world. He couldn't live on Joyce's couch forever, even though if she had asked him to... he would do it in a heartbeat.

Joyce didn't want to admit it but she cried in the shower that morning. It hurt her heart to know he wouldn't be there anymore. He'd be around but he wouldn't be there to enjoy breakfast with her or to watch a movie at night beside her.

It wasn't a matter of him taking care of Will that she would miss, even though she definitely would miss the help. She would miss *him*.

--

"Hey, buddy." Hopper said as he held Will in his arms. The baby stared up at him with beaming brown eyes.

"I had a lot of fun with you this week. I didn't expect to like this so much." Hopper laughed quietly as the baby grabbed towards his beard.

"I started to feel like we're all a real family. I'm really gonna miss it here, I'll miss all of you." Hopper said as he rubbed his eyes.

"I'll be around though. I promise I won't let you down, I don't ever want you to have to look at me like your dad. I'll always be here for you, kiddo." He sighed as he brushed down the baby's hair with his palm.

Hopper gently set Will back down in his bassinet before finding Joyce in the kitchen.

--

"Alright uh... I'm off." Hopper said with a deep breath. He felt like his heart was stuck his throat.

"I really, *really* can't thank you enough for this, Hop." Joyce said as she forced a sad smile. She couldn't ask him to stay, he had gotten her back on her feet... he did what he came to do. She couldn't let false domesticity do this to her.

"Don't worry about thanking me, Joyce. I did this because I care about you and the boys. I want you safe and comfortable. Please make sure you get good rest, alright?" Hopper asked as he squeezed her shoulder.

Joyce nodded in response. "I'll go get Jonathan." She said quietly before trailing off to her eldest's room.

When she was out of his sight, Hopper groaned and scrubbed his face with his hands. This was harder than he thought.

--

Hopper stood by the door as Joyce came back with Jonathan.

Kneeling down to the little boy's height, Jim smiled and patted his shoulder.

"I had a lot of fun this week, kid. Be good for your mommy, alright?" Hopper smiled and ruffled his hair.

"I'll be good. I promise. Thank you for reading to me this week. I really liked it." Jonathan's voice was shaky, almost as if he was going to cry. The same way Joyce had looked as she stared down at the two.

"Goodbye, buddy." Jim said with a sad face.

"Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting." Jonathan repeated from the book Hopper read to him.

Joyce heard the sharp inhale of a pained breath from Hop. He was looking up at the ceiling while pinching the bridge of his nose.

Joyce pulled Hopper into a vice-like hug, hiding her face from him. "Thank you so much." She whispered.

"Anytime, Sweetheart. Anytime." Hopper said as he rubbed her back.

"Alright. I uh... I guess I should get going." Hopper said as he nervously pointed towards his blazer.

"Goodbye, Hopper." Joyce said sadly.

"Goodbye, Joyce." Hopper said with a deep breath as he turned to the door. Grabbing his bag, he walked out and shut the door behind him.

Joyce felt her heart speed up when the door shut. She was gonna be sick if she stood there any longer.

Running towards the door, swung it open. "Hopper Wai—mmpf"

She couldn't finish her sentence before Hopper clasped her face gently in his hands, pressing his lips to hers.

They stood there in the cold for what felt like years as they kissed. Neither of them could bring themselves to end it.

Once she pulled away, Joyce looked up at him with tears in her eyes. "Don't go, Hop, please." She cried as she held onto him like her life depended on it.

Hopper looked down at her with a sad expression. "I couldn't do it. I couldn't get my feet to move. I tried but I just couldn't." He said as his chest pounded from loss of breath.

Before either of them could say another word, Joyce pulled him down and smashed her lips to his.

He didn't leave, he never left. He was home now.

Notes for the Chapter:

I LOVE FLUFF

8. Years Down the Road

Summary for the Chapter:

Epilogue!

Ten months later

"Joyce. Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?" Hopper asked as he got down on one knee. The whole restaurant seemed to watch in suspense.

Before Jim could open the black velvet box, Joyce was nodding vigorously, unable to find her voice.

Hopper slid the ring on her finger while the restaurant cheered. He picked his now fiancée up and kissed her deeply.

Seven months later

"I now pronounce you Husband and Wife! You may kiss the bride." The minister smiled as Hopper leaned down and kissed her with a smile.

The crowd cheered, filling the church full of clapping and joy. Jonathan was standing in a ring bearer tuxedo, smiling up at his parents. He had been just as excited as Joyce when they announced their engagement. Will was tucked onto best man Benny's hip as he looked around at the cheering crowd.

Five months later

"Joyce? Babe, are you home?" Hopper called as he walked in the door. He smiled as he saw Will standing in his playpen.

"Hey, buddy. Where's mama?" Hopper asked as he leaned down to pick the baby out of his play area. "Ugh. You're getting heavy." He said with a fake groan.

"Joycie? Where are you?" Hopper called again. Walking through their house, he found her staring nervously at something in her hand.

"Whats wrong, baby?" Hopper asked as he set Will down to toddle off.

"We're uh... we're pregnant." Joyce said quietly as she awaited Hopper's reaction.

"Oh my God, that's amazing!" Hopper said with a huff of a shocked laugh.

"Yeah, I just... wow." Joyce said quietly. She was obviously exasperated and clearly still in shock

"We're having a baby." Hopper said with a laugh as he kissed her cheek.

"We're having a baby." Joyce confirmed as a smile broke through.

Nine months later

Hopper could hear Joyce crying from the waiting room. It made his heart hurt every time Jonathan asked him if she was alright.

"Yeah buddy, she's alright." Hopper reassured every time. Luckily, Will was still too young to understand since he was only almost two.

Hopper had tried to get into the room but no matter what he said, they wouldn't allow him in. He just wanted to trade places with her, save her from the pain.

"Jim Hopper?" A nurse called. He shot out of his seat and brushed his clothes off. "Yeah! That's me! How's my wife?" Hopper asked nervously.

"She's good, you and the boys can go back now." The nurse said as she motioned for them to follow. Hopper took both of the boy's hands and walked towards the nurse.

After the three of them arrived in Joyce's hospital room, they saw her laying in bed with a little pink bundle.

"Hey, honey." Hopper said as he cautiously approached. As gently as he could, he leaned down and pecked her on the lips.

"Hi, sweetheart." Joyce said tiredly. She motioned for Jonathan to come over and see the baby.

"What's her name?" Jonathan asked with eyes full of curiosity while Hopper picked Will up into his arms.

"Daddy and I settled on the name Sarah Jane. What do you think?" Joyce asked as she smoothed Jonathan's hair out of his face.

"I like it, Sarah Jane Hopper." Jim said with a smile as Jonathan nodded happily. "What do you think, Will?" The eldest brother asked.

"Yeah!" Will cheered happily as the rest of them laughed and smiled over the baby.

This was family, and family was forever. Nobody had to say goodbye this time.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed this.

Author's Note:

Duffer Brothers, I love you assholes. Thanks for letting me fuck up your creations lmao